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## The EU's Eastern Partnership as International Governance: What Is the Role of the Civil Society?<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the civil society dimension and pays particular attention to the role of civil society's organizations within the EU's Eastern Partnership's governance and networking processes. The study is based on the EU's documents' analysis and the data of qualitative interviews conducted between 2011-2014 from the respondents of the EU's institutions (European Commission, EEAS, EP), member states' representations in Brussels, and the members of the Eastern Partnership civil society forum created in 2009. The study shows that the representatives of civil society organizations are seeking to be involved and are existent in most of the stages and interactional modes of the EU's relations with the Eastern Partnership countries, and this process predicts the conditions for the emergence of international governance in the Eastern neighbourhood space. On the other hand, the representatives of CSOs are complaining about not being involved enough in the negotiations deciding over the Association or other kind of agreements between the EU and their (EaP) country.

**Keywords:** Civil society, Eastern Partnership, international governance, European neighbourhood policy

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## 1. Introduction

The European Neighbourhood policy (ENP), established by the EU in 2003/2004, and ENP first Action plans with the EU's eastern and southern neighbours, which started to be implemented since 2004, as the important EU's external policies have been examined by an enlarging group of scholars (van Vooren, 2012; DeBardeleben, 2008; Korosteleva, 2011; Schimmelfennig, Lavenex, 2009) paying attention that the 'neighbour' concept was 'invented' in the EU's external policy (Parmentier, 2008: 105).

The other initiative of the European Union- Eastern Partnership (EaP)- launched by the EU in 2009 had not introduced essential changes comparing with the ENP conception but additionally created multilateral platforms and networks for the cooperation between the EU and six EaP countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia). The goal of all these EU's neighbourhood policies remained the same - to create stable, secure and prosperous neighbourhood focused on economical approximation, democracy and promotion of other values - nonetheless, without any clear vision of the final goal for future relations between the EU and the neighbouring countries. Therefore, it has been almost ten years of this policy implementation and it has shown very modest results in strengthening democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedoms, and in other "values"/normative perspective<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, none of the Association, DCFTA Agreements with the EaP countries has yet been signed, although it was believed to happen after Vilnius summit in November 2013. The researchers and practitioners have very different explanations for this outcome. The majority of scholars underline the EU's asymmetric power and normative dictate directed towards the neighbours without possibility to receive the clear "carrot" of Europeanization - membership perspective (Bonvincini, 2006; Tassinari, 2005; Casier, 2008; Hillion, 2008). The lack of the EU's ability to influence the leaders of EaP countries as well as geopolitical competitions with Russia, which the EU's big member states (e.g. Germany and France) are not prepared or even have no intention to play, are emphasized as the problems undermining the results as well.

The other group of scholars is focusing on the institutional modes of governance and networking within different policy areas (Lavenex, Lehmkuhl and Whichmann, 2009; Barbe, Costa, Surrallès, Naturski, 2009; Youngs', 2009) arguing about results being different in distinct sectors of ENP, also depending on a specific ENP partner. The institutional modes of ENP governance is another object of this study. This article examines one segment of the European neighbourhood or Eastern Partnership policy - the civil society dimension. The main objective is to investigate and analyze how the civil society organizations have been integrated into the ENP, EaP creation, implementation, and governance processes. What are the central positions of the EU's officials and the representatives of CSOs on how and where the CSOs should take part in the processes and what are the problematic aspects? Will it lead to the emergence of the innovative international partnerships and international governance?

In many cases the scientists analyze the importance of civil society for the internal country's politics and socio-political processes. However, today researchers also started to speak about the role of CSO in international politics, as well as the international organizations' support for the CSOs as a form of international democratization. Kristi Raik (2006) examining how the European Union's instruments and foundations support the non-governmental sector in the Eastern European countries, emphasized the weakness of post soviet civil society. Kristian L.Nielsen, Eiki Berg and Gulnara Roll (2009) researched the possibilities of civil society organizations as the agents in the European neighbourhood policy. T.Rommens,

<sup>2</sup> For more information look at the Freedom in the world: accessed online on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at url <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2006/ukraine>. E.g. Ukraine's status in 2006 was 'free' while in 2013 'partly free'

R.Thiers (2009) analysed the importance of CSOs for the implementation of ENP Action Plans in the case study of South Caucasus region.

Civil society has demonstrated the powerful movements during the last several years in the EU's neighbourhood countries (e.g. Ukraine today/2014), and the leaders of civil society organizations are becoming important partners for the supranational EU's institutions such as the European Commission, EEAS<sup>3</sup> and in some cases European Parliament. Thus, it is important to research the role and the activities of CSOs as it is an inherent part of the transitional countries political future.

## 2. The International Governance Approach

This article suggests that the EU's Eastern Partnership might be attributed to international governance. The notion of governance recently has become a fashionable and widely spread term, especially in defining the EU's internal and external policies. The researchers Mathias Albert and Tanja Kopp-Malek describe it as „...the entirety of discourses on global and European governance as an indicator of the establishment of ‚post-Westphalian‘ vocabularies within IR's way of conducting ‚normal science‘(2002: 470)“. As Stefano Bartolini (2011:1-19) explains, the governance approach in international politics and European studies is tied with the new order and modes of regulations, and also highlights the emergence of innovative international partnerships seeking to solve the common problems collectively.

The term governance is understood and explained variously in different fields of sciences (comparative politics, international relations or European studies), and it also depends on the adaptation of the term. In the most general sense, the notion of governance appeared as the opposition to strictly hierarchical mode of government. Yet, Jan Kooiman, (2005; 2010) understands governance as continuum from strictly hierarchical governance techniques to self - regulatory networks, and this approach helps to identify and classify the different modes of governance and institutional interactions in either European or international politics. The governance in international politics observes international institutionalism and social constructivism (Thierry Balsacq, 2009) which focus on how the new norms, rules, institutions and practices evolve on the specific international environment (A.Sweet, N.Fligstein, W.Sandholtz, 2001).

International governance aims to create partnerships and interactions between state institutions, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, supranational institutions and local actors to solve common problems (Torfin, Peters, Pierre, Sorensen, 2012: 21) and to react to increasing interdependences. International governance seeks to create the long term partnerships and networks, and institutionalised cooperation by establishing bilateral and multilateral regimes (Albert and Kopp-Malek, 2002: 462).

The EU's Eastern Partnership as international governance involves all EU's member states' governments, supranational EU's institutions, and six Eastern partners' governments. The institutional modes creating four multilateral platforms and panels<sup>4</sup> as regular meetings/networks, which also involve civil society representatives, have become the features of international governance. All these participating actors have the goal to create the new order and common regulations of the intended policies and sectors

<sup>3</sup> EEAS- European external action service- diplomatic service of the European Union, created after the adaptation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Eastern Partnership Four Platforms are: 1) Democracy, good governance and stability; 2) economic integration and convergence with EU policies; 3) Energy security; 4) People to people contacts. For more information look at: [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm) accessed online on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

of the cooperation. The regular meetings and networks theoretically allow to obtain and share the voices and opinions of all the actors involved.

The interactional modes of the Eastern Partnership have the specific elements of the European governance as well. First of all, the interactional structure of the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership is very similar to the EU's internal governance system and this suggests the thesis that the EU is seeking to transport its internal governance system towards the neighbourhood area promoting the similar model of governance including the rules of the EU's *acquis communautaire*. As Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig (2009) suggest: "the notion of governance is particularly suitable to grasp this process of rule expansion beyond formal membership in the EU polity" (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009: 795).

Moreover on the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership the EU's conditional policy is visible as a form of europeanization. Sometimes it is described as a 'hard governance' (G.Bosse, E. Polglase-Korosteleva, 2009:146) while network governance promoting regulatory change through socialization (soft Europeanization) and networking (Lavenex, 2007) is defined as the 'soft governance'.

Both modes of bilateral and multilateral governance were analysed, and both are present in the EU's relations with the Eastern partners. Bilateralism of the Eastern partnership is more associated with hierarchical mode of the relationship based on 'soft' conditionality. It includes negotiation and implementation of ENP Action plans, negotiations for the Association, DCFTA agreements with a specific Eastern partner when the EU is more imposing on the partner to take a certain EU norms, values and standards based on 'soft' conditionality. Secondly, the multilateral track of the EaP is forming the multi-sectoral, transnational networking in the four platforms of Eastern partnership, and other regional forums, and seeks the normative change through socialization. The objective of this article is to answer if and how the both modes of the governance integrate the civil society organizations. In the meantime, none of the strict contractual relations establishing treaty (Association and DCFTA) has yet been signed. Consequently, EU's bilateral conditional policy and relationship with the political leadership of these countries face several challenges and shortcomings of which the 'carrot' shortage and too high demands are evident. Therefore, there are more arguments to speak about the emergence of the international governance within Eastern Partnership than the European governance per se.

### 3. Research Method

The methodology used in this article is mostly of a qualitative nature. Following the governance and institutionalism theory and seeking to clarify the institutional modes, qualitative research was conducted for variations of bilateral and multilateral frameworks of the EU's neighbourhood policy, hierarchical and network governance institutional setting, and the civil society's role in it. The documents' analysis and the qualitative semi-structured interviews are two main methods used in this research.

Documents' analysis: in order to attain the official side of the research question, an amount of the documents of the European Union were analyzed. The document analysis includes various kinds of the ENP documents: regulations, annual strategic plans, ENP Action plans, documents and working papers of the European Commission and the European External Action Service, country reports, and regional strategies.

The qualitative semi-structured elite/ experts interviews were conducted throughout several phases in Brussels (2011, 2012, 2014) and in the other places from the personnel of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (8 interviews), the European Commission (3 interviews) and the European Parliament (9

interviews<sup>5</sup>); the diplomats of the Permanent representations of member states (14 interviews<sup>6</sup>), and the representatives of the Eastern Partnership civil society Forum (3 interviews<sup>7</sup>). In total 37 interviews were conducted. The duration of the interviews varied between 24 minutes to 94 minutes. The interviewees were asked to give their positions on the modes of the governance in the Eastern neighbourhood policy, effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral institutional settings, and the role of civil society. The selection of respondents was conducted according to the nature of their work and expertise. All the respondents work directly with the EU's foreign and neighbourhood policy making, implementation agenda, and programs. In order to grant the discretion of the respondents, they are encoded. The codes are given according to an institution represented by a respondent, and the numbers - according to a date of an interview.

#### 4. The Main Results: Participation of CSOs in Bilateral and Multilateral Patterns

The civil society organizations unsurprisingly have been considered as important players for the success of this policy<sup>8</sup> from the start of the European neighbourhood policy creation. As the key goals are to spread democracy, rule of law, human rights - the so called normative dimension- the documents highlight people to people contacts and civil society development (ENP strategy paper 2004: 21). The regulation on the European neighbourhood and partnership instrument (2006:article2 (l), p.4) identifies that: *“supporting democratization, inter alia, by enhancing the role of civil society organizations and promoting media pluralism, as well as through electoral observation and assistance”* – is an essential aim of the cooperation with the partner countries. The other EU's documents also identify and emphasize the EU's engagement with CSOs saying that: *“The importance of dialogue between civilizations and the free exchange of ideas between cultures, religions, traditions and human links cannot be over-emphasized. The EU should contribute to the development of a flourishing civil society to promote basic liberties such as freedom of expression and association.”* (Wider Europe, COM 2003:12).

The more intensive engagement with the representatives of civil society of Eastern neighbourhood countries on the European level started from 2009 when the Eastern Partnership and the Eastern Partnership civil society forum were established. The Eastern Partnership is considered as one of the most intensive EU's external policies (interview, LT1) creating links and networks on various levels of representatives of governmental institutions and other organizations including civil society from six post soviet countries and the European Union. As the diplomat of the European External Action service noted:

*Networking among politicians, is and has been but, I think, in these processes the networking among the people is much more important. The European Union focus a lot of its attention on the civil society, if you noticed, all the regional cooperation, policy for the region is supported by the civil society*

<sup>5</sup> The interviews from the respondents of the European Parliament include both the members of EP and secretariat, diplomatic advisers. The interviewers represent all the main EP bodies working on the ENP and EaP.

<sup>6</sup> All the interviews from the member states representations in Brussels were collected in January, 2014. The inquiries for the interviews were sent out to all the representations of 28 member states, but due to the response and availability of the respondents interviews were conducted from Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Romania's diplomats.

<sup>7</sup> The requests for the interviews were sent out to all the members of the Steering Committee of the EaP civil society Forum but three representatives accepted to give the interviews. Two interviews were taken by phone and one from the head of Civil society Forum in Brussels in January, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>The documents underline the importance of civil society: Strengthening the civil society dimension of the ENP. COM (2006) 726 FINAL of 4 December 2006, P.1; European neighbourhood policy. Strategy paper. COM (2004) 373 FINAL. P.19



forums<sup>9</sup>. Interview, European External Action Service, official, department of ENP coordination, cross-border cooperation, 14. 10. 2011, Brussels, EEAS5.

This attention to civil society dimension after the Polish presidency in 2011 was added by two new financial instruments - European Endowment for democracy and Civil Society Facility- focused towards the development of CSOs. However the first one is not governed and financed by the European Commission, but depends on the member states' funding. According to the respondent<sup>10</sup> it is considered as NGO which supports the opposition movements, various NGOs and human rights activists and even various pro-democratic forces including "small, new unregistered groups" in ENP countries (Dempsey 2013). By creating this initiative the goal is to support CSOs and political groups "in more flexible and less formal way than the EU does" it now (Interview EP2). The other instrument- Eastern neighbourhood Civil Society Facility- covers 37 million euro for the period of 2011-2013 according to the Europeaid<sup>11</sup>. The respondents of CSOs complained that the funding is not sufficient and the activities of the Civil Society Forum, including the secretariat, are financed minimally covering the travel and staying expenses of CSOs annual meetings. However, there is no information about the actual numbers of the EU's total support for the CSOs activities in EaP countries as it is also funded by the European instrument for Human rights and democracy and there is a difficulty to measure all support. On the other hand, the interviewees emphasized the importance of the EU's financing in order to have the regional forums and meetings at all: *the secretariat was established and financed by the Commission, and the financing of the Forum meetings, so yes, the contribution is important part of the work, because you can imagine they would not have the funds to come together and to meet their counterparts, and as well the work in working groups, travel and accommodation are quite expensive, and they get the funding from the EU side which is quite helpful.* Interview, EaPCSF<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, the European Commission and other EU's institutions, and the financing coming from the EU are essential for the existence of the civil society forums.

**Table 1** identifies the main ways of how the civil society representatives are integrated in the common international governance of the Eastern neighbourhood policies.

**Table 1.** Involvement of CSOs into the European neighbourhood governance

The ways of integration of CSOs		Seeking	Results
Bilateralism (bilateral approaches)	1. NGOs, CSOs integration into the negotiations of the ENP Action Plan, Association Agenda (setting of priorities); 2. NGOs, CSOs integration into the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ENP Action Plan, Association Agenda.	1. To strengthen dialogue between civil society and national government of the ENP country; 2. To involve civil society into internal state reforming; 3. Independent NGOs, CSOs are the important source of information;	From non-existent to weak, depends on the regime/government of the partner country and the EU; From partly to strong involvement into

<sup>9</sup> The respondent also underlined the problematic aspects of the process: *Of course, there are countries where we have problems with the co-operation with the civil society organizations. For instance, there was (...) a PhD student, who came to Brussels and then lost her placement at a local university, and such cases are known to be discouraging for the civil society to cooperate with us, but this is more the exceptional cases. Hence, a cooperation and it's density depends on a country, the society and on a question/issue. What issues we can solve with the civil society.* Interview, European External Action Service, official, department of ENP coordination, cross-border cooperation, 14 10 2011, Brussels, EEAS5.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the diplomatic adviser, European Parliament, 12 10 2011, Brussels, EP2.

<sup>11</sup> For more information look at: Europeaid, Eastern neighbourhood civil society Facility, accessed online on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at [urlhttp://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/csf\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-east/csf_en.htm)

<sup>12</sup> More information and details about the interview and interviewee please find at the list of references.

			monitoring/evaluation
Multilateralism (multilateral approaches)	1. Creation of long term regional networks of civil society organizations (EaP Civil society Forum, Black Sea Synergy forum); 2. Multilateral programmes (Eastern Partnership four platforms, Black sea synergy).	1. To establish permanent contacts between civil society in the region and spread of information, good practices; 2. Networking and strong partnerships of CSOs may have a bigger impact either towards the EU for funding or to national bodies; 3. To establish the trust among civil society in the region, "bottom-up regionalism".	Strong: Established annual meetings and contacts, sharing Weak, shortage of specific proposals, results  From weak to partly: existence of CSOs as "gangs"

Source: created by the author with reference to the European Commission (2004, 2006), Raik (2006), Rommens, Thiers (2009), Tassinari (2005).

The European neighbourhood policies created various bilateral and multilateral institutional modes, and co-operational interactions with the Eastern partnership countries. This international governance is perceived as a long term process seeking to create a stronger institutionalization of the relations by establishing common rules of the neighbourhood governance in almost all the sectors of the cooperation, specifically in the ones which have the strongest impact on the neighbourly relations, such as energy policy, common trade, migration and asylum policies. In the official and diplomatic discourse this process of international institutionalization is labeled as the approximation of common rules and standards. But in fact, as most of the diplomats agreed, it means that the countries negotiating for the Association agreements, DCFTA which potentially open up for them the possibility to participate in the EU common market and the visa dialogues seeking to create visa free travel regime - within both have to implement EU rules, part of *acquis communautaire* and specific roadmaps (interviews with EEAS4, EEAS6). Consequently, this process has the similarities with the enlargement using the principles of conditionality and "more for more", and is wider related with the hierarchical mode of the governance. On the other hand, as none of the Association, DCFTA agreements has been signed and ratified yet, the EU faces the shortcomings of the europeanization. Furthermore, as the research of other scholars show, the negotiations depending on the countries and sectors might be more often based on the international or collectively agreed rules than only based on the EU's *acquis normative* base (Barbe, Costa, Surralles, Natorksi 2009).

#### 4.1 Negotiations and Monitoring

Due to the fact that the level of democracy, political systems and civil society capacities are very different in partner countries (European Commission Com 2006 (726), the most intensive cooperation is present on the bilateral pattern. There are several important stages of the policy creation and implementation: negotiations for the ENP Action plans, or Association, DCFTA agreements (setting the priorities and negotiating for political reforms in the partner country), implementation and evaluation of these plans and agreements. According to the European Commission (Com 2006 (726): 2), discussions with civil society usually take place prior to sub-committee meetings consisting of the representatives of the EU and the partner country. According to the respondent, theoretically there is intention to create tripartite dialogue (called national platforms) between the government of partner country, CSOs and EU delegation in the partner country. The rhetoric of the EU's documents urges that this form of cooperation will strengthen the dialogue between the civil society and the government and also involves the civil society into internal state reforming processes. However, the research results show that the existence and effectiveness of these tripartite dialogues are very different in different EaP countries and it depends on the government/regime of the EaP



country and also on the EU. As a good example the Georgian case was mentioned when the government is willing and sharing the information with CSOs, while the countries like Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia do not have any intention to involve CSOs in the dialogues between the EU's delegations and the government, and dialogues with civil society representatives take place separately.

But even when speaking about good examples such as Georgia, the role of civil society organizations is very minimal within the negotiations processes. Here the distinction should be made between the two processes: the negotiations for the agreements between the EU and partner country, and the monitoring/evaluating the policy results. All respondents of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum said that they have no possibility to fully participate in the negotiation process.

*"...national platforms express some concerns for example the negotiation on free trade agreement, <>... that civil society doesn't know exactly the contents of these agreements what Moldova is negotiating exactly about this trade agreement ...<>, recently there was a steering committee meeting and we raised this question, and visa, free trade agreements, there is the same situation when we speak about almost all the Eastern Partnership countries... Interview, EaPCSF1.*

Therefore, the civil society representatives practically do not hold any real power to act in the process when speaking about the negotiations for the ENP bilateral agreements and it depends not only on the government of the country but even more on the European Union side:

*"Frankly speaking there is no way to influence the text of DCFTA or Association agreements because this is treated by the European side, by the European Commission as not open document and until the last stage of those documents we are not shared so we are not offered the text to comment, we just see the final result and that's it. We also noticed that some governments like the Georgian government were telling us that we are willing to share with you the draft text of DCFTA but it's the requirement of the European side that this document can not be reviewed. So and in our several monitoring reports we also mentioned this policy making process should be more open so that first of all the civil society has the opportunity to contribute and then it has more ownership of the process. Interview, EaPCSF3, Brussels 21 01 2014.*

The respondents of the Commission argued that the negotiation in its nature is the closed diplomatic process while the civil society representatives underlined the importance of spread of the information to the public on the positive and negative sides of what the potential agreements might bring for their countries and for them personally.

The other process - monitoring and evaluation of policy results- is more open to the public and civil society. The European Commission carries out regular assessments, reports, evaluates the progress of implementation of the ENP Action Plans, roadmaps and etc. In the 2006 paper „*Strengthening civil society dimension in the ENP*“, emphasis was put on the monitoring of the ENP Action Plan implementation, and that it cannot be done solely by official sources because civil society always observes better the impact of policies on everyday life and, particularly, human “*rights, the business climate, the environment*”, and access to government information fields (European Commission, 2006:2). The EU's Eastern Regional Programme Strategy Paper (2007 – 2013: 18) states that the support (assistance) for civil society organizations' assessments, monitoring, and information activities is provided. As Aart Scholte suggests:

*„...civic associations can provide opportunities for concerned parties to relay information, testimonial, and analysis to governance agencies“ (2001:17).*

Civil society organizations are important source of information (Interview, EaPCSF2). According to the respondents, the monitoring processes involve civil society organizations better than in the negotiations.

*Civil society organizations are consulted when we speak about the progress reports, we are consulted by the EU delegations and can give an input. Furthermore, Civil society Forum is now conducting the next monitoring of the roadmap and we want to present the report before the summit, to see how the country is doing, implementing the roadmap, is it going to the right direction. Interview, EaPCSF2.*

Comparing the results with the previous research (T.Rommens and R.Thiers, 2009 and others)<sup>13</sup> it might be stated that the situation within the negotiations process did not improve, while the involvement of civil society organizations into monitoring process and consultations with them increased. The input of the civil society organizations towards the monitoring and evaluation is collected by the EU delegations in the partner countries.

#### 4.2 Networking and Socialization

As indicated in the first table, the European Union is actively promoting the „networking“ of civil society representatives and their participation in the multi-regional cooperation processes. Regional cooperation is considered to be extremely important in establishing new contacts, sharing of the „good practices“, spreading the information and solving common regional problems (as a form of “effective multilateralism” highlighted in the European security strategy (2003). The respondents agreed that there is a strong cooperation, established permanent contacts and sharing of the good practices and experience. The Civil society forum was described as open inclusive structure – as up to 400 representatives take part in Forum each year and there “is a quite large percentage of new organizations who are stepping into forum or are elected to be part of the forum in this particular year” (Interview EaPCSF3). One of the aims of regional forums is to strengthen both mutual relationships and a dialogue with a government of their own country. Theoretically NGOs, united in important forums, may influence them more, may have the bigger influence either towards the national governments or to the European Union side (T.Rommens and R.Thiers, 2009: 35).

*„...we meet about 200 civil society organizations each year to ... discuss the issues, we work in different working groups, and civil society organizations in different countries working on similar issues without a Forum would have be difficult to meet and to know it. When they meet, they can share their experience, their tactics, they can group together make common statements to the government, and of course they have another way as they come from Civil society Forum and they*

<sup>13</sup>The research was made by: Open Society Georgia foundation, Eurasia Partnership foundation. Civil society and monitoring implementation of European Neighbourhood policy Action plan. Civil society Survey results. Tbilisi, 2008, p.3, accessed online on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at url [http://www.epfound.ge/files/enp\\_survey\\_2.pdf](http://www.epfound.ge/files/enp_survey_2.pdf) and Rommens T., Thiers R., Strengthening the ENP through regional civil society cooperation. CEU political science journal. Vol.4, No.1 February 2009, p.30

*are supported by many organizations and are different in comparing with one civil society organization in one country". Interview, EaPCSF2.*

Regional synergy empowers them in the relations with their governments while the EU's institutions have become not just important partners but also supporters:

*As soon as we would have some studies, outcomes the proves of the spread of high corruption or other field we would rather prefer to present our results to European Commission to get some protection as if it is virtual but is very important for us, and then spread message among public institutions.<>... because speaking about the issue of Moldova's accession towards this lets say European vector is important, and our government take the thing seriously that are promoted by the EU institutions. Interview, EaPCSF1.*

Hence, countries seeking stronger integration with the EU (e.g. Moldova) are sensitive to receive the negative EU's position. EU institutions is an important factor influencing the rise of the civil society's activeness in the international politics when speaking about the Eastern neighbourhood governance. However, the respondents too highlighted the negative aspects:

*I am really not satisfied with this Forum and I understand that every forum has still a bureaucratic procedure, we spend a lot of time on election process, we spent a lot of time on discussing formal things, what I would be happier to see is very concrete proposals...<>... where each of this working groups are discussing concrete objectives, problems in the field, what can be done...How we can find resources to be much more concrete in our relations and activities in this platform. Interview, EaPCSF1.*

Multilateral regional cooperation in the EU neighbourhood proceeds in various levels, ranging from multilateral intergovernmental forums (Eastern Partnership four multilateral platforms and panels<sup>14</sup>), multilateral parliamentary assemblies (Euronest with the Eastern partnership countries), and, finally, in order to form working on a lower level - common multilateral networks of civil society (Rakutiene, 2012). In the Eastern neighbourhood currently there are two regional initiatives approved: Eastern partnership (2009), and Black Sea synergy (2008). Eastern Partnership multilateral dimension created four platforms and many more panels for intensive networking among various actors: supranational, governmental/diplomats, bureaucrats and civil society representatives. This institutional setting is very similar to the EU's internal institutional interactional model starting from the summit<sup>15</sup>, also having meetings of the various sectors of ministers, working committees and groups, parliamentary Assembly (Euronest) and also civil society representatives. Such system creates good conditions for the intensive socialization and networking, and mutual learning process is taking place. As the Lithuanian diplomat noted one of the

<sup>14</sup>Eastern Partnership Four Platforms are: Democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; Energy security; People to people contacts For more information look at [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm), accessed online on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014

<sup>15</sup>It is visible from the documents: Council of the European Union, Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May, 2009, Brussels, 7 May, 2009: 8435/09 ( Presse 78). European External Action Service, The Eastern partnership Warsaw Summit (29-30 September 2011, accessed online on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/2011\\_eap\\_warsaw\\_summit\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/2011_eap_warsaw_summit_en.pdf)

most important achievements between the Prague and Warsaw Eastern Partnership summits was the establishment of these networks (Interview, LT1).

Eastern Partnership Civil society Forum just recently<sup>16</sup> (2012) started to be invited into the working groups of the Eastern Partnership four platforms, and as the respondents underlined, this is a good opportunity for them to convince the European partners about the better EU policies or decisions towards their countries. Representatives of civil society are allowed to speak, to “present and comment freely” (Interview, EaPCSF3) at the meetings.

*“Civil society is invited to all official platforms and there they have a chance for the presentation-basically at each platform and this allows us to provide our perspective on what’s going on. For example during last platform 1 meeting we presented our monitoring project. We monitored EaP roadmap – how the EaP governments implemented the roadmap to Vilnius summit. And our estimation of how it was done was quite different from the estimation of the European Commission, because, how to say, we were free to say what we want, we were not limited by some relations with the governments- that they need to be build, continue to be building. We were free to say what’s happening without too much of diplomacy, so basically our opinion is listened to and taken into consideration by the European External Action Service and the Commission”. Interview, EaPCSF3*

Civil society organizations at the each of these meetings have two representatives and they are usually experts on the issues discussed at the meetings, but as the respondents noted the effectiveness of the representation depends on the question as, e.g. in transport or energy sectors the EaP Forum would face with the difficulties to find a good experts within NGO structures (Interview, EaPCSF2, Interview, EaPCSF3). The other shortcomings are related with the agenda and organizational matters as sometimes EaP Civil society Forum receives the agenda from the EU’s institutions just a few weeks (usually 3) before the meetings and there is a shortage of time to find the good experts representing regionally civil society and to arrange their arrival to the meetings in Brussels. Also, in general the shortcomings are related with the fact that civil society in post soviet states continue to be very weak<sup>17</sup> (Aybars, Onnik, 2012; Raik, 2006). As the member of the European Parliament noted:

*Problematic situation, as I had to monitor the functioning of some non-governmental organizations and one can clearly see that, on the one hand, some of them are genuine, but there is a part that is a sinecure where political leaders dive straight from politics into NGOs, and have a privileged position and their offices look more impressive than that of the former Soros Open Society premises. There are very privileged ones, which are clearly favorite ones of the local politicians, and so we are seeing some imitation or simulation. Interview, European Parliament, member of the EP, Committee of Human rights, 12 10 2011, Brussels, EP3.*

<sup>16</sup>The documents and respondents identified it: European Commission, High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy. Joint Communication Delivering on new European Neighbourhood policy, Brussels, 15.5.2012 JOIN (2012) 14 final

<sup>17</sup> The research also shows the very small trust in the NGO sector. As e.g. according to the research “...trust in NGOs is quite low in Armenia (only 5% fully trust), Azerbaijan (7% fully trust) and Georgia (4% fully trust)”. The research was conducted in 2011 by CRRC. Cited from: Gorgulu Aybars, Krikorian Onnik, Turkey’s South Caucasus Agenda: the role of state and non-state actors, Imak Ofset Basim Yay in San., 2012: p.7, accessed online on July 14th 2013 at url [http://www.epfound.org/files/southcaucasusagenda24\\_07\\_12web.pdf](http://www.epfound.org/files/southcaucasusagenda24_07_12web.pdf)

The representatives of the Eastern Partnership civil society forum also identified it as a problem which sometimes undermines the decision-making of the Forum and defined these kind of NGOs as a "gangs" emphasizing that "there is no very clear condition what would be a gang, and there is no official definition and not any rule to separate these gangs from the non-governmental NGOs" (Interview, EaPCSF1). According to the respondents, today the specific attention and funding by the EU institutions is paid on the development of civil society's capacities, and their professional development.

## 5. Conclusions

During the last several years the institutions of the European Union have paid a special attention to the role of civil society organizations within the Eastern Partnership's governance, the policy making between the EU and post soviet countries. Bilateral and multilateral patterns of the governance were examined in this article with the focus on the role of civil society. The results of the research by analysing EU's documents and collection of interviews from various respondents representing different EU's institutions, member states and civil society show the increasing activeness and representation of civil society organizations within Eastern partnership's structures and networks. These findings allow speaking about the emergence of international governance within the EU's Eastern neighbourhood space. On the other hand, the effectiveness and the results of the policy are not there yet. The scale of the involvement of civil society representatives into the governance of ENP and EaP depends on both the EU and the national governments of the partner countries. The less the government is autocratic, the more inclusive it is. Concerning the bilateral mode of the governance and the negotiations for the Association Agenda, the role of civil society is very minimal in the process. The respondents emphasized that they do not receive the information about the content of negotiations and cannot contribute to this process, and it depends on the EU side even more than on the national government. Nonetheless, interviewees agreed they are consulted by the EU delegations in their countries during the monitoring and evaluation of the policy implementation. The multilateral patterns like the EaP Civil society forum, EaP four platforms and panels are inclusive and open for the civil society representatives allowing them to openly present their suggestions and choices on what decision and policy the EU should make in regards to their countries. These forms of governance also open the possibilities for networking, socialization and mutual learning leading to the regional synergy in specific sectors expertise.

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